

Slaughterhouse Five

Study Questions

Chapter 1

1. Why wasn't Vonnegut able to write about his experiences in Dresden for so many years?
2. Explain Vonnegut's reaction to the movie-maker's comment about anti-war books, "Why don't you write an anti-glacier book instead?"
3. Vonnegut seems to imply that machines have a destructive effect on humans. How does the image of the veteran in the elevator make that implication? Find a quote that relates the idea of machinery to the massacre of war.
4. What point does Mary O'Hare make about war stories? What is Vonnegut's reaction?
5. Vonnegut seems to see war as senseless, something humans should feel shame for doing. Find two things mentioned towards the end of Chapter 1 that support this statement of Vonnegut's view of war.
6. After Vonnegut leaves the O'Hare's, he begins to think about time. Consider the following references that he makes to time and write one or two statements of the idea of time Vonnegut is suggesting:
 - a. "We went to the NY. World's Fair, saw what the past had been like . . . saw what the future would be like ... and I asked myself about the present: how wide it was, how deep it was, how much was mine to keep." pg. 18
 - b. "The time would not pass. Somebody was playing with the clocks . . . There was nothing I could do about it. As an earthling, I had to believe whatever clocks said and calendars." pg. 20
7. Vonnegut ends Chapter 1 with an allusion to the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The story mentions God's destruction of cities of people. However, because Lot and his family are good, God spares them and tells them not to look back at the destruction. Lot's wife does and is turned to a pillar of salt. What is Vonnegut's opinion of Lot's wife and how does this anecdote relate to the purpose of the novel?

Chapter 2

1. Explain what it means to be "unstuck in time." How does Billy Pilgrim feel about the fact that he is "unstuck in time"?
2. Vonnegut repeats "he says" twice on Pg. 23 Why?
3. Vonnegut gives you the actual sequence of events in Billy's life so you can put Bill's experiences in order as you read them. List the events of Billy's life.
4. Describe the Tralfamadorians and what can be learned from them.
5. Anytime Vonnegut mentions death, he writes "So it goes." Why?
6. After Billy's head injury from the plane crash, why is his daughter a "flibbertigibbet"?
7. According to Billy, he comes unstuck in time while he is in World War II. Describe what leads up to his feeling this way and perhaps causes this feeling.
8. After Billy becomes unstuck in time while leaning against the tree, what events of his past and future flash into his mind?
9. One of the soldiers Billy is wandering with in the forest is called Roland Weary Weary is the opposite of Billy and provides contrast to Billy How is Weary different from Billy?
10. Based on what Vonnegut has told you so far, list everything you know about Billy's attitude towards life/death.
11. Use a dictionary to find out what a pilgrim is. How is Billy Pilgrim like this?
12. What is ironic about Billy's survival at the end of Chapter 2 and the start of Chapter 3?
13. Vonnegut uses vivid imagery to give the reader a "clear picture" of the point. What image is used for Billy Pilgrim? Find another image that is particularly vivid.
14. Billy starts to hallucinate; find evidence of this in Chapters 2 and 3.
15. There is a description of the crucifix that hangs on Billy's wall as he is growing up. Explain this in terms of the war. Explain the statement describing his mother's purchase of the crucifix.

Chapter 3

1. In Chapter 1 Vonnegut tells the reader that he has promised Mary O'Hare that he will not make war glamorous. Give some details that show he is keeping this promise.
2. Throughout Chapter 3 Billy travels in time frequently His mind seems to travel between the war and different experiences he has had in his life. As a result, there are two-story lines. One story line is of the war, and the other is Billy's life after the war. Which story line, although broken by the other story line, remains continuous, picking up and continuing from the same point each time?
3. In Chapter 2 you are told that the creatures on Tralfamadore "can look at all different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains. They can see how permanent all moments are and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever." How is Billy like the Tralfamadoreans? Do you think other people think like Billy does? If so, in what way?
4. Stream-of-consciousness is a technique that writers use to duplicate the thinking process of people. We think in a process of association; one idea triggers another thought, which in turn reminds us of something else and so on. How is Vonnegut using the technique of stream-of-consciousness with Billy? Give an example of the process of association in Billy's thinking.
5. One effect of Billy's time travel is that he seems to be experiencing the war at the same time he is experiencing other events in his life. Give an example from either Chapter 2 or 3 of how Billy is simultaneously experiencing the war and other events in his life.
6. When a person is under psychological pressure, his mind keeps returning to and "replaying" the events associated with what is disturbing him. How is this true for Billy? What do you think is creating the psychological pressure in Billy's life?
7. Find evidence to support the idea that Billy is not content even though he becomes a wealthy man.
8. Find a quote that reinforces Vonnegut's idea that machines are dangerous for humans.
9. Find two vivid images that show the cruelty of war. Consider the river of humiliation.
10. Find evidence to support the irony that Billy finds as much misery in 1967, despite his "comforts," as he does while he is a POW
11. Why do you think Billy has the "Prayer of Serenity" on his wall?
12. How does Billy's characterization remain consistent?

Chapter 4

1. What kind of mood does Vonnegut create in the beginning of Chapter 4? What images help to create this mood?
2. What images are you given in this chapter that Vonnegut has used in earlier chapters?
3. What point about time and life is Vonnegut making by having Billy watch a World War II movie backwards?
4. The Tralfamadorians see time as fixed; they say we are like bugs in amber. Explain this image.
5. Turning your attention to the POW World War II storyline, list three things that have changed for Billy.
6. Describe the circumstances of Weary's death?
7. Contrast Paul Lazzaro and Edgar Derby.
8. The Tralfamadorians do not even consider the idea of free will. Free will is the idea that people can control their future by the decisions they make. What do the Tralfamadorians think in respect to man's ability to control the future. What advice is given to Billy?
9. Do you agree with the Tralfamadorians view of time? Explain.
10. Science fiction writers often use the creatures they make up to comment on how we do things. What comment is Vonnegut making about us with the Tralfamadorians?

Chapter 5

1. Reread the description of the Tralfamadorian book.
 - a. Explain how Vonnegut is writing a book in this style
 - b. Literature is considered a reflection of life. How is this novel, written in "Tralfamadorian" style, a reflection of Vonnegut's view of life?
2. Describe three images that have an impression on you. Why did these images catch your attention?
3. What irony do you see in the situation with the POW Englishmen?
4. How is Billy in reality one of the giraffes of his dream while he is in "morphine paradise"?
5. How are Eliot Rosewater and Billy similar? What does Eliot offer Billy that is "a big help"?
6. Find a quote that describes the conversation between Billy's mother and Eliot. Explain it.
7. Vonnegut has Edgar Derby reinforce his two main points about war. What are they? What metaphor for war is used?
8. How do you feel about Edgar Derby? Why?
9. What is your opinion of Kilgore Trout's change in the New Testament?
10. Describe what you find interesting about Billy's life on Tralfamadore.
11. Explain the advice the Tralfamadorians give Billy in respect to war.
12. What is your opinion of Billy's marriage to "the ugly Valencia"?
13. What do you find comical at the end of this chapter? Describe at least two images?
14. Re-read the passages from Howard W Cambell, Jr., Pg. 128 - 131. What is your opinion of these ideas? Find evidence in our present society to support or refute Cambell.
15. Who is Montana Wildhack? Why is she considered the fantasy of a middle-aged man?
16. At what point in the story does Chapter 5 end?
17. What is the most gruesome image in this chapter?

18. Chapter 6

1. What is your opinion of Lazzaro? Explain.
2. What promise does Lazzaro make to Billy? Considering Billy's description of the death, explain why think Lazzaro will or will not keep this promise.
3. Again, what is Vonnegut's attitude towards death which is expressed by Billy?
4. Vonnegut has made several direct criticisms of American life. What do you notice in this chapter about elections and speeches that can be an indirect mockery of the American system.
5. Who is the "leader" of the men? What do you think Vonnegut's point about leaders is with this description?
6. Do you agree with the Englishman's points on the importance of appearances? Do you think Vonnegut does, considering who survives the Dresden bombing?
7. "The eight ridiculous Dresdeners ascertained that these hundred ridiculous creatures really were American fighting men fresh from the front. They smiled, and then they laughed... Here were more crippled human beings, more fools like themselves." How does this quote develop Vonnegut's themes about war?
8. What is the significance of the novel's title, Slaughterhouse Five?

Chapter 7

1. Pg. 155 Vonnegut's subject is racism against Polish people. Explain the two ways Vonnegut shows this racism.
2. What is Billy expecting to happen? Why doesn't he tell anyone what he expects? What association is he making with this and the war? Why?
3. Explain the statement "Everything was pretty much all right with Billy" Pg. 157.
4. What do you find humorous in this chapter?
5. Vonnegut contrasts racism and humanitarianism in this chapter. Explain. What do you think Vonnegut is saying about human nature?

Chapter 8

1. What is your opinion of Howard W Campbell, Jr.? Explain.
2. Describe the reactions, including Derby's, to Campbell.
3. In this chapter Vonnegut interrupts the narrator and speaks directly to the reader saying, "There are almost no characters in this story , and almost no dramatic confrontations, because most of the people in it are so sick and so much the listless play things of enormous forces. One of the main effects of war, after all, is that people are discouraged from being characters. But old Derby was a character now" What is Vonnegut's point? Do you agree? What is Vonnegut's attitude towards Derby?
4. Where does Billy "go" while his is waiting in the shelter under the slaughterhouse? Explain your opinion of Kilgore Trout.
5. Describe Billy's reaction to the barbershop quartet that sings during the party. What is Trout's opinion of Billy's reaction?
6. When Billy goes upstairs alone, he realizes what the quartet has reminded him of. Explain.
7. Vonnegut doesn't have Billy= time travel to return to the story line of the war this time. Explain what is different and why this difference is significant.
8. This chapter is considered the climax of the novel. Explain how both story= lines climax in this chapter.
9. What image does Vonnegut use to describe Dresden after it has been bombed.
10. In this chapter consider the descriptions of scenes with the following people: Campbell, Trout, Maggie White, the blind inn-keeper. Which one can you visualize most clearly? Explain your choice.
11. In your opinion, why doesn't Vonnegut give more descriptive detail of the bombing of Dresden?

Chapter 9

1. Why does Valencia die?
2. In your opinion, why does Vonnegut include Rumfoord in the story?
3. Reread the quotes that explain the bombings on Pg. 185 - 188 What is the point of each quote? What is your opinion of the bombings and massacre during war?
4. Describe Billy's condition after the airplane crash, considering the following: "Actually, Billy's outward listlessness was a screen. The listlessness concealed a mind which was fizzing and flashing thrillingly."
5. What is Rumfoord's opinion of Billy? What is your opinion of Rumfoord and his opinions? Explain what is meant by "Rumfoord was thinking in a military manner."
6. When Rumfoord finally takes an interest in Billy and credits Billy for having been in Dresden, what opinion of the Dresden bombing does Billy express? Do you agree with Billy? Do you think this is Vonnegut's opinion of the Dresden bombing? Explain.
7. In your opinion, what is the significance of Billy's "sun-drenched snooze in the back of the wagon," followed by Billy= bursting into tears over the horses. Do you think Billy can concentrate on this moment of his life as the Tralfamadorians advise him?
8. Billy can be interpreted as a Christ figure. Give some evidence of this interpretation. Do you see Billy as a Christ figure?
9. How does the Dresden experience come to an end for Billy?
10. After he has been released from the hospital, why does Billy go to New York?'
11. Describe how Billy behaves in the bookstore.
12. How do the people in the radio station react to Billy and his information?
13. Explain Montana's reaction when Billy tells her that he has seen some movies that she has made.
14. What do you think the significance of Montana, Billy, and their baby is?

Chapter 10

1. Why do you think Vonnegut mentions Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Vietnam, and his grandfather, followed by the Tralfamadorian interest in Darwin "who taught that those who die are meant to die that corpses are improvements."
2. Vonnegut goes on to say; "If what Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadorians is true, that we all live forever, no matter how dead we may sometimes seem to be, I am not overjoyed. Still, if I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I'm grateful that so many= of those moments are nice." What is Vonnegut's opinion of the Tralfamadorian ideas of death and moments of time?
3. Why do you think the Tralfamadorians are more interested in Darwin than Jesus?
4. What is Vonnegut's last gruesome description of the bombing of Dresden?
5. What is ironic about the Maori's death?
6. Why do you think Vonnegut juxtaposes Edgar Derby's death with the descriptions of the corpse mines?
7. Reread the ending. With what two points about the war does Vonnegut conclude?
8. What is Vonnegut's concluding image of death?
9. What do you think happens to Billy Pilgrim? In your opinion why doesn't Vonnegut give the reader a conclusion to Billy's life?
10. In conclusion, do you think this is a anti-war book, or does Vonnegut think war and suffering are a part of life that we can't control?